Fort Miles Artillery Park to add 90 mm anti-aircraft gun to collection

DOVER – A World War II model M2 90 mm anti-aircraft gun is scheduled to be delivered to the Fort Miles Artillery Park in Cape Henlopen State Park on Thursday, March 30, through a partnership between DNREC's Division of Parks & Recreation and the Fort Miles Historical Association.

The gun came from the collection at the National Electronics Museum in Linthicum, Md., which determined the Fort Miles Artillery Park was the best-suited location for permanent placement because of its reputation for interpretation.

"The Fort Miles Historical Association is dedicated to bringing in important World War II artifacts to the artillery park which benefits Delawareans and visitors alike," said DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin. "We salute the association's commitment to remembering 'The Greatest Generation' that served at the Fort, who kept our country safe during WWII. This latest acquisition also contributes to Delaware's tourism industry and helps boost our economy by adding to the artillery park's historic appeal."

This type of 32,000-pound anti-aircraft gun was used on ships in both the European and Pacific theaters during WWII. It could fire either high explosive or armor-piercing shells weighting 24 pounds at a rate of about 25 rounds per minute. These projectiles would leave the muzzle at a velocity of 2,700 feet per second and were capable of hitting land or water-based targets up to 11 miles away, or aircraft flying up to 34,000 feet in the air.

Unlike the other guns in the collection on display in the park, the M2 is the only type that was actually used at Fort

Miles. “This was a model that was actually used at Fort Miles towards the end of the war,” said Jim Hall, chief of cultural resources for the Division of Parks & Recreation. “We know they were being used here for top-secret research starting in early 1944 that involved the ‘Proximity Fuze’ – the development of which none other than Gen. George S. Patton believed was second only in importance to the atomic bomb in bringing victory to the Allied Forces.”

Hall said a radio transmitter inside the “fuze” of an artillery shell sent out and received radio signals, constantly calculating distance – proximity – so that the shell would detonate when it was near a plane or tank instead of making direct contact with the target. Fort Miles served as the proving ground for this highly-classified technology prior to its being deployed during WWII.

Prior to installation in the Artillery Park, onsite restoration of the gun by Fort Miles volunteers should be completed this fall.

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